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CLAIMS

1) A method of packing an orderly group (1) of packets (2) of cigarettes; the method comprising the steps of folding a sheet (11) of heat-seal transparent plastic packing material about the orderly group (1) to form a tubular wrapping having two tubular portions (21) projecting with respect to the orderly group (1), each tubular portion (21) comprising four flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f), folding each flap (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) onto the orderly group (1), so as to at least partly superimpose said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f), and sealing the superimposed flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) to one another; the orderly group (1) being packed solely in the sheet (11) of transparent packing material, so that the packets (2) are visible through the sheet (11) of packing material; the method being characterized in that at least an outer flap (18d) has a portion (19) bearing graphics (20) and said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) are sealed by melting the sheet (11) of packing material to define at least one bead seal (22, 23, 24, 25) outwards of said graphics (20).

2) A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said orderly group (1) has two main faces (8), two lateral faces (9), and two end faces (10); said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) being superimposed on said end faces (10).

3) A method as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, wherein said at least one bead seal (22, 23, 24, 25) defines an endless path (26) surrounding said graphics (20).

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4) A method as claimed in Claim 3, wherein said endless path (26) is defined by a number of adjacent bead seals (22, 23, 24, 25).

5) A method as claimed in Claim 4, wherein said
5 adjacent bead seals (22, 23, 24, 25) overlap.

6) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 3 to 5, wherein each said bead seal (22, 23, 24, 25) is located close to an edge of said orderly group (1).

7) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 6,
10 wherein said sheet (11) of packing material comprises a central panel (12), and two lateral panels (13) separated ideally from the central panel (12) by two ideal fold lines (14); the method comprising forming slits (16) along the lateral panels (13), and which extend between
15 the edges of the sheet (11) of packing material and said ideal fold lines (14) to define a number of portions (18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e) defining said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f).

8) A method as claimed in Claim 7, wherein each slit
20 (16) is formed by cutting said sheet (11) of packing material.

9) A method as claimed in Claim 7, wherein each slit (16) is formed by cutting and blanking to remove part of the sheet (11) of packing material.

25 10) A method as claimed in Claim 8 or 9, wherein a portion (17) of said sheet (11) of packing material at one end of said slit (16) is thermally perforated and hardened.

11) A method as claimed in Claim 8 or 9, wherein an

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adhesive label (27) is applied to said sheet (11) of packing material at one end of said slit (16).

12) A method as claimed in Claim 9, wherein each slit (16) is formed by cutting said sheet (11) of packing material, combined with melting the slit (16) at one end of the slit (16).

13) A method as claimed in Claim 9, wherein each slit (16) is formed by melting part of said sheet (11) of packing material.

10 14) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 7 to 13, wherein the sheet (11) is detached of packing material from a continuous web of heat-seal plastic material.

15 15) A sheet of packing material for implementing the method of packing an orderly group (1) of packets (2) of cigarettes as claimed in any one of Claims from 1 to 14; said sheet (11) being made of transparent heat-seal plastic material and being folded about the orderly group (1) to form a tubular wrapping having two tubular portions (21) projecting with respect to the orderly group (1), each tubular portion (21) comprising four flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f); the flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) being superimposed and sealed to one another; the sheet (11) of packing material comprising a central panel 20 (12), and two lateral panels (13) defining the projecting tubular portions (21) when the sheet (11) of packing material is folded about the orderly group (1) to form a tubular wrapping; the sheet (11) of packing material being characterized in that each lateral panel (13)

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having slits (16) dividing the lateral panel (13) into adjacent portions (18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e) defining said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) of a respective projecting tubular portion (21); at least one of said portions (18a, 5 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e) having graphics (20).

16) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 15, wherein each lateral panel (13) extends between a free edge of the sheet (11) of packing material and an ideal fold line (14).

10 17) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 16, wherein each slit (16) has a first end located at said free edge, and a second end located between said free edge and said ideal fold line (14).

15 18) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 17, wherein said second end is located at said ideal fold line (14).

19) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 17 or 18, wherein, at said second end, each slit (16) is curved to prevent initiating a tear in said sheet (11) of 20 packing material.

20) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 18, wherein said second end of the slit (16) is defined by an opening (29) bounded by a curved endless edge.

21) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 25 20, wherein said opening (29) is formed by blanking the sheet (11) of packing material.

22) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 20, wherein said opening (29) is formed by melting the sheet (11) of packing material.

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23) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 19, wherein said second end of the slit (16) is in the shape of a curved hook (28).

24) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 5 18, wherein each slit (16) is defined by a slot (30) having two opposite edges (31) connected by a curved side (32) at the second end.

25) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 16 or 17, and comprising an adhesive label (27) at the 10 second end of each slit (16) to prevent initiating a tear in said sheet (11) of packing material.

26) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 16 or 17, and comprising a thermally hardened portion (17) of the sheet (11) of packing material at the second 15 end of each slit (16) to prevent initiating a tear in said sheet (11) of packing material.

27) A sheet of packing material as claimed in any one of Claims 15 to 26, wherein said graphics (20) comprise a bar code.

20 28) A sheet of packing material as claimed in any one of Claims 15 to 27, wherein said graphics (20) are located on a non-transparent portion (19) of said sheet (11) of packing material.

29) A sheet of packing material as claimed in any 25 one of Claims 15 to 28, wherein said sheet (11) is made of polypropylene.

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